

CHILDREN AMENDMENT BILL

My name is Marumo Abram Kgari, the founder and Principal of Oratile ECD Centre, chairperson of Diepsloot ECD Forum, and also founder and chairperson of Children First network of ECD Practitioners, with representation from all over the country.

I would first like to apologise as there was a glitch in communication between me and the organizers of this meeting. I was only informed this morning at around 10am that I will be speaking to you people, so forgive me if my preparation seems not to be on par. I did sent my written submission about the children amendment bill sometimes in November last year, and I appreciate the fact that I have been nominated to form part of the presenters on this day.

It feels really good when ordinary people who are actively involved in the lives of children are also recognised by the government of the people by the people.

Children amendment bill came as an opportunity to address significant challenges in the ECD sector, of which the challenges are not substantially addressed by the Bill, and I understand.

Yes, I understand because those involved and the role players do not have full understanding of the challenges faced by the ECD practitioners on the ground, and attempts has not been made to try and understand the sector properly.

However, I would like to thank you all involved for responding to the written submission we made last year around November, Yes, you responded well, because here I am, as an ordinary member of society and children activists, speaking on behalf of other Practitioners and children who cannot speak on their own.

To you, our government we love, I say: for over 25 years you have not only been unfair and doing injustice to children in South Africa, but you have been very much unfair to the ECD practitioners on the ground. These are the people who make sure that children are taken good care of, they are in safe environment daily, they are provided with nutritious meals and they get proper stimulation.

But what kind of support do they get from various government departments? Almost none, if you are telling me that DSD is funding ECD Centres with R17 per child per day, my question to you will be; how many children are benefitting from that, my answer to you without mentioning numbers, will be it’s only the few children from the better resourced Centres. Meaning, a Centre need to have money in order to benefit from Government money. In order words, the poor are not counted anywhere. I am saying that because the requirement for registration with DSD are just way beyond the abilities of most Centres in rural areas and in the townships.

If felt so bad when on several occasions I would tell some practitioners not even to try and apply as they stand no chance of being helped or succeeding.

My humble message to all government departments is: please refrain from making decisions about children without the involvement of children, of cause you cannot involve children, but we have representatives of the children on the ground, the people who spent every minute looking after children and providing for their needs. These are the people who masters the art of bringing themselves to the level of the children when they are in the classroom and then back to adults when they are outside their work environment. They jump with children, roll out with children and in short, they are hands on.

We have a saying in Diepsloot that you cannot decide about Diepsloot without an involvement of Diepsloot. So I am challenging you all to consider hearing from the active members of the community in relation to any decision you would like to take in relation to certain sector.

Yes, most of the ECD Practitioners may not be educated enough to understand the big English words, but this is the government for the people and by the people. So the people in government understand the language of our people, and that should not be a problem at all.

In this case, we are talking about the children’s amendment bill, and the bill is about children, and the main place you can find children is at ECD Centres around the country. We like it or not, we have ECD Centres all over the country, whether you label them as registered or unregistered, fact of the matter is that they are taking care of millions of children in SA. Government’s philosophy should be that where there are children they are involved, and not until you meet our most complex criteria of registration, then we will be involved. DSD is the one issuing NPO certificate to ECD centres, and then come back to say those centres are illegal. Some of the Centres like mine, is registered for NPO, Health department, City of Joburg and Sars, and yet it is listed as an illegal Centre just because it’s a high mountain to register with DSD. Some people would often ask me why I am still not registered with DSD? No, to be honest, I am at a position to register with DSD but I am deliberately delaying, because once I start eating, I may forget to continue with the battle I have not yet won. 90% of ECD Centres in Diepsloot are not registered, and I would rather be counted amongst the majority than the minority. I will only be ready to register and receive funding when at least half the Centres not registered in the country are starting to be recognised. It’s a worrying fact that with all the great work we do, yet we are never mentioned anywhere in Government, except by the NGO’s like Nelson Mandela Foundation, Bridge etc. The only democratic president to ever speak about ECD was President Ramaphosa in his first sona, and since then it became obvious that what he said was nowhere planned by Government as no one from the government was able to answer our questions in relation to function shift from DSD to education. Its only now that we are starting to see some rays of lights, and we truly appreciate that. I would like to remind you again not to forget us when you decide about us.

I believe in the Sepedi proverb that says; sekoloana se se nyane se ikokoketsa ka monkgo, and the English phrase that says: Shine in the little corner where you are. That I do.

During lockdown, when depression was affecting ECD practitioners the most, I had to try and shine in my little corner by establishing a network of ECD practitioners from different parts of the country. We have a WhatsApp group called children first, which gave birth to 3 more WhatsApp groups as the first one became full on the first day, we now have 4 WhatsApp groups where I do daily motivation from Monday to Friday. We also expanded into telegram and Facebook group to interact with ECD forces. We advise and inform each other about everything related to ECD and the good thing is that we are a rainbow nation, meaning we have all races of people in the group. We are helping each other a lot, to ensure that we all do things professionally and know what is expected of us.

Allow me to repeat my call: You can’t decide about ECD without the involvement of ECD, we are not asking that you get every ECD practitioner to become part of your decision making. Few people who are actively involved in the ECD Sector will help you a lot to understand the challenges of ECD practitioners on the ground, and to know what is best required.

Hope our concerns and pleas will not go down to the drain.

I thank you!